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ABSTRACT

This paper describes several continuing and emerging issues identified in a 4-year study of a teacher induction program in New Brunswick, Canada. The program was designed to link beginning teachers with exemplary experienced teachers so that the transition from student to teacher would be a more positive experience than is often the case. Data come from questionnaires sent each year to beginning teachers, mentors, principals/schools, and coordinators. The paper focuses on three key recurrent issues: Who qualifies as a beginning teacher? What are the key criteria for selecting and matching experienced mentor teachers with their novice partners? and What are reasonable professional expectations for the partners? In looking at emerging issues, the paper focuses on the best way to meet the unique needs of specialist and itinerant teachers who participate in induction programs. (Contains 11 references.) (SM)

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Four Years Later: Issues in Teacher Induction

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Four Years Later: Issues in Teacher Induction

The purpose of this paper is to identify and discuss several continuing and emerging issues which have been identified in a four-year study of a teacher induction program in the Province of New Brunswick from 1995 to 1999. After a brief description of the Beginning Teacher Induction Program (BTIP), the author will attempt to identify insights which have been learned from three issues which have concerned the Provincial Steering Committee from the beginning of the program: Who qualifies as a beginning teacher? What are the key criteria for selecting and matching experienced mentor teachers with their novice partners? What are reasonable professional expectations for the partners? As the BTIP evolved and became fine-tuned, other issues have emerged. The author will discuss one of these emerging issues: What is the best way to meet the unique needs of specialist and itinerant teachers?

Background to the BTIP

The initiative for an induction program in New Brunswick came from the office of the Professional Development and Innovations Branch of the Anglophone section of the Department of Education. Looking ahead to significant increases in teacher retirement projections, the Director was concerned about the impact on the school system if large numbers of inexperienced teachers were suddenly placed in classrooms. Consequently, in 1993 he established a provincial Steering Committee. This committee, which included representatives from each school district, the New Brunswick Teachers' Association, and the University of New Brunswick, assumed responsibility for developing and implementing an induction program in the province. Its purpose was to link beginning teachers with exemplary experienced teachers so that the transition from student to teacher would be a more positive experience than is often the case otherwise.

After two years of pilot projects, in 1995 the Department of Education implemented an induction program for beginning teachers in all 12 anglophone districts of the province. Table 1, which follows, outlines the numbers of participants in each of the successive years. The data upon which this paper is based has been drawn from questionnaires sent each year to the four groups of participants listed in the table. Annual reports by the author (Scott, Smith, & Grobe, 1995; Scott & Compton, 1996; Scott, 1997; Scott 1998; Scott and Surette, 1999) provide details of these undertakings. These reports are available from both the Department of Education, Fredericton, NB, and the ERIC Database (Resources in Education).

Table 1

A four-year comparison of BTIP participant numbers

Participants	1995-96	1996-97	1997-98	1998-99
Beginning Teachers	156	125	210	253
Mentors	147	125	210	253
Principals/Schools	96	78	108	130
Coordinators	12	12	12	12

Recurring Issues

Who Qualifies as a Beginning Teacher? While it may seem a simple matter to declare that a beginning teacher is anyone who is a recent graduate of a teacher-training program and who lacks paid teaching experience, it was not that easy in our case. In the mid 1990's in New Brunswick, very few graduates were moving directly from the university into classrooms. New teachers often had to supply teach for several years before securing a permanent contract. With a surplus of teachers, school administrators were reluctant to offer even temporary contracts for long-term supply teachers. Consequently, when new teachers were hired, many brought a variety of previous experiences with them. The Steering Committee's ruling was that if a teacher was signing his/her first district contract, then they could be considered a beginning teacher for the purposes of the Program.

Scott and Surette (1999) reported that approximately one half of the teachers in the 1998-99 BTIP had previous teaching experience. This ranged from several months of supply teaching to several years of contract teaching in another jurisdiction. The reactions of these "experienced" beginning teachers to their involvement in the BTIP varied. Most appreciated the opportunity and found it valuable. The comments of a teacher in District 16 were representative of the majority:

> Even though I was not a 'beginning teacher', the program was beneficial to me. It gave me time to utilize resources (my mentor), to learn the curriculum at my new grade level, to become familiar with new programs and practices, and [it] provided me with a compatible teacher with whom to officially consult when questions and concerns arise. My mentor was wonderful. In fact, she and I used this year as a foundation on which to build a team-teacher relationship for upcoming years. Thank you very much. It was a valuable experience.

While it is evident that the agenda for an "experienced beginner" may be different than that of a "real beginner", participation in the BTIP and having a mentor was viewed by most as a positive, professionally-developing experience. However, in 1999, six of the seven teachers who did not find the Program beneficial, were experienced teachers who did not appreciate being treated as beginners. These six teachers had teaching experience which ranged from long-term supply to five years of full-time teaching. Consequently, they found some of the BTIP activities were not suitable to their stage of development. The following teacher, even though she had relatively limited previous experience, was typical of those who felt they did not belong in this program:

> I really didn't consider myself to be a 'new' teacher. I supply taught on a constant basis for one and a half years in another school district and had a six-month long-term supply position last year. Some of the activities weren't of much benefit to me. I do think the BTIP is very useful though for a 'real' beginning teacher.

Another teacher with five years teaching experience made several positive observations about the Program while clearly pointing out that, for him, the program came too late:

> The BTIP program is an excellent program, however, I would have benefited more had I been involved when I was an actual 'beginning teacher'. I have picked up a lot of useful information that was repeated during this program. I couldn't have been paired with a better mentor, and because of this, my learning continued. I strongly recommend all beginning teachers, including long-term supply teachers, continue to take this program.

A teacher with four years of previous teaching experience in the United States reported being frustrated by being mis-matched with a mentor who lacked sufficient background and skills to interact meaningfully with an experienced partner. One can only speculate about how the mentor felt being paired with a teacher whose background and insights might rival or even surpass her own. Were they intimidated? Did they assume that collaboration was unnecessary? The experience of a specialist 'beginning teacher' with four years previous experience who was matched with a mentor with a different teaching assignment, suggests that, in their case, the latter was true. No observations occurred; there was very little interaction between them. Since mentors were not asked specifically whether their partners had previous experience, it was impossible to make connections unless mentors offered it. Only one of the five mentors who felt their partners had not benefited from the Program hinted that previous experience was a contributing factor. However, this quotation from District 18 provides one mentor's reflection on being assigned an 'experienced' beginning teacher.

> I would like to be a mentor to someone whose teaching career is actually just beginning. My BT had several previous years teaching experience, and I'm not sure in this case if it was necessary to participate in the program as they are not really beginning.

It is interesting to note, that despite their own reservations about the personal benefits of the BTIP for their partners, all of these mentor teachers recommended the continuation of the program for others.

Should any teacher who is new to a district be eligible? Should anyone with more than a year's teaching experience be accepted into the Program? Where does one draw a line which is professionally reasonable and fiscally responsible? While reaching a consensus may prove difficult, it seems to me that some beginning teachers who qualified for the BTIP should have been excluded. Beginning teachers seem to benefit most from an induction program during their first two years of teaching. After that initial critical period is past, I suggest that professional improvement, peer coaching, or programs which have agendas designed specifically for experienced teachers are more appropriate.

Clear guidelines for determining who qualifies as a beginning teacher need to be articulated and implemented in order to protect the integrity of any induction program. Even then, the situation will not always meet all needs. The question of whether to include long-term supply teachers is an example. Officials in one school district in New Brunswick felt so strongly that they used local funds to include several long-term supply teachers in their program. The comments of participants and my own intuition support this position as being both appropriate and proactive, from the perspective of teacher induction. Partly as a result of this initiative, the Steering Committee has since agreed that supply teachers who are hired for only one term will be eligible to participate in the BTIP.

Selecting and Matching Mentors with Beginning Teachers. Throughout the period of my research, both mentors and beginning teachers consistently reported that lack of time to meet was the problem they experienced most frequently. I have concluded that this obstacle comes with the job and that there is little to be gained from discussing it in more detail. The BTIP provides funds for each set of partners to buy approximately six supply days during the school year. Additional time will require either increased financial resources or a higher prioritization by participants. Instead, I prefer to focus on the selection and matching of mentors with beginning teachers because my research on induction problems suggests that there are several selection and matching criteria which could improve induction programs, if organizers consistently used them.

Both the literature (Saskatchewan Teachers' Federation, 1992) and our experience in the BTIP suggest three basic criteria for selecting mentors: mentors should be volunteers, who have at least five-years' teaching experience; they are recognized by their peers as teaching models worthy of emulation. The importance of following these guidelines was reinforced for us in 1998 when the number of partners rose to 210 from 125 the previous year (See Table 1) and the level of satisfaction reported by beginning teachers dropped dramatically. At the same time, district coordinators reported that they found it increasingly difficult to attract sufficient numbers of suitable mentors. While other factors, such as mentor training, could have been involved, the 1998 Annual Report (Scott, 1998) suggested that, faced with a need to recruit many mentors quickly, administrators may have compromised these criteria for mentor selection.

A fourth criterion for mentor selection and matching is the similarity of the teaching assignment. Over the life of the BTIP, 20 to 30 per cent of beginning teachers have indicated that being paired with a mentor who taught a different grade or subject added an extra tension to their relationship. If school administrators are able to identify new teaching positions in advance, then it may be possible to arrange mentors who meet this criterion. However, in times of tight budgets, new teachers are often hired at the last minute or even after school has begun, and it may be difficult to recruit any mentor, let alone one with a similar teaching assignment. This is a problem particularly in small schools with fewer potential mentors. Our data documented many examples of situations like this and explained why several principals acted as mentors, despite a warning in the BTIP handbook (Ho Fatt, 1998) that this was not recommended. Furthermore, it is often impossible to match beginning specialist teachers with mentors having similar teaching assignments in the same school. This unique situation will be discussed later under the heading of emerging issues.

The location of the beginning teachers' classroom in relation to the mentors' also affects how often the partners interact. Ideally, partners' classrooms should be in close proximity. The further apart they are, the less likelihood that beginning teachers will receive regular emotional, professional, and technical support from their mentors. Hence, a fifth criterion for matching partners is the physical proximity of their classrooms. As was the case with similar teaching assignments, this criterion is easiest to meet when hiring occurs before the end of the school year. Itinerant teachers (generally specialist teachers) represent a special case of partners who find it virtually impossible to meet this criterion. Their situation will also be discussed under the heading of emerging issues.

Although they may be outstanding teachers, those who volunteer to act as mentors will nonetheless require specific training to prepare them for their new role. It is essential that they be provided with opportunities to learn the expectations of an induction program and to be reminded not only what are the needs of beginning teachers, but also that these needs change over the course of a school year. Although our data make it very clear that nearly all mentors enjoy the professional recognition and opportunities for personal and professional development which come with the Program, they also appreciate incentives such as release time from class, recognition certificates, and closing banquets.

Professional Expectations of Partners. Another recurring issue involves the kinds of professional activities which can reasonably be expected from mentors and beginning teachers. Should participants be encouraged to meet pre-set norms of interaction or is it enough to let partners discover their own comfort zones? Initially, the Steering Committee tended toward the latter path.We focused mentor training on interpersonal and communication skills and identified the basic needs of beginning teachers, but set few expected targets with respect to activities.

Over the four years of BTIP research, beginning teachers were asked to indicate the frequency with which they participated in specific professional activities generally associated with induction programs. It soon became obvious that these activities fell into two, quite distinct, categories. Activities which presented little emotional risk, such as discussions of various professional topics or sharing resources, enjoyed significantly higher participation rates than activities which made teachers feel uncomfortable, such as observing one another teach, being observed, or providing feedback following an observation. Table 2 compares participation rates for these so-called low-risk activities, while Table 3 does the same for higher-risk activities.

While the discovery that induction activities could be grouped into two categories of risk should not have come as a surprise to anyone associated with teaching, it did have implications for the way the Steering Committee structured subsequent training. The low levels of participation on the higher-risk activities concerned some organizers. They believed that increased participation in these activities would have a positive impact on developing the teaching strategies of both new and experienced teachers. Also, beginning teachers consistently indicated that they wanted more opportunities to participate in the higher-risk activities. The question became one of

Table 2

A percentage comparison of beginning teachers' participation rates for specific low-risk professional activities during the 1996, 1997, 1998 and 1999 Induction Programs

Professional Activities		Frequency 0	1 - 6	7-10	>10	*p < 0.05 **p < 0.01
1. Make informal contacts with mentor at school	1999	0.5	6.8	10	81.7	
	1998	1.2	10.5	8.1	80.2	
	1997	1.6	3.2	4.8	90.6	
	1996	4.6	12.3	12.3	70.4	
2. Discuss teaching ideas or strategies	1999	2.5	14.7	30.4	53.4	
	1998	2.3	20.3	23.8	53.5	
	1997	0	11.7	20	68.3	
	1996	3.1	27.5	23	45.9	
3. Share or research teaching materials, books, etc	1999	4.2	24.1	28.3	41.4	
	1998	10.5	32.5	19.8	37.2	*
	1997	1.6	20.6	33.3	44.4	
	1996	10.7	33.7	16.8	38.2	
4. Discuss curriculum or lesson planning	1999	2.6	23.6	31.4	40.8	
	1998	7.6	33.3	22.8	36.2	*
	1997	3.2	19.4	22.6	54.8	
	1996	10.7	33.7	19.9	35.2	
5. Discuss student assessment or reporting	1999	2.1	29.8	30.9	35.6	
	1998	10.5	37.2	22.7	29.6	**
	1997	1.6	27.4	25.8	45.2	
	1996	12.7	30.2	23.8	33.3	
6. Discuss classroom management techniques	1999	6.8	30.4	33	27.2	
	1998	7.6	31	28.7	32.7	
	1997	0	20.6	27	52.4	
	1996	6.3	36.5	27	30.2	
7. Discuss administrative policies or procedures	1999	5.8	37.2	25.7	28.8	
	1998	9.3	39.5	26.2	25	
	1997	1.6	30.6	22.6	45.2	
	1996	6.2	40.6	21.9	23.4	

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determining how to raise the expectation for more frequent challenging activities while maintaining the high level of support expressed by participants. Fortunately, previous research by Odell (1986) and Kilcher (1991) shed some light on this predicament.

Odell suggests that the needs of beginning teachers change as the school year evolves. Technical and information concerns such as locating resources and operating a photocopier dominate the early agenda of new teachers, but decline as the year progresses. On the other hand, a beginning teachers' needs for emotional support and for professional assistance in curriculum development, instructional strategies, and classroom management appear to increase from first to second term.

Table 3

A percentage comparison of beginning teachers' participation rates in specific high-risk professional activities during the 1996, 1997, 1998 and 1999 BTIP

		Frequency				
Professional Activities		**0**	**1 - 5**	**6-10**	**>10**	***p < 0.05 ****p < 0.01**
1. Meet mentor in scheduled (formal) setting	**1999**	8.4	50.8	22.5	16.8	
	1998	17	52.3	17.6	13.1	
	1997	14.5	51.6	12.9	21	
	1996	15.3	71.9	4.6	7.6	
2. Receive feedback about my teaching from mentor	**1999**	16.8	52.4	13.6	14.1	
	1998	26.2	44.2	13.9	15.7	
	1997	27.4	38.7	16.1	17.7	
	1996	27	50.8	15.9	6.3	
3. Mentor observes me teach	**1999**	28.8	50.8	6.8	10	
	1998	41.5	45	8.2	5.3	
	1997	46.8	35.5	8.1	9.7	
	1996	46	46	7.9	3.2	
4. Observe other colleagues teaching (not mentor)	**1999**	22.5	58.6	10	6.8	
	1998	28.4	58.6	8.3	4.7	
	1997	22.6	62.9	8.1	6.4	
	1996	50	39.1	0	10.9	
5. Observe my mentor teaching in his/her own class	**1999**	24.1	52.9	8.4	10.5	
	1998	43.8	42.6	7.7	5.9	**
	1997	41.9	35.5	12.9	9.7	
	1996	51.6	40.3	0	8.1	

This insight helped us realize that mentors can normally meet the needs of their partners at the beginning of the school year and build interpersonal bonds without having to participate in activities which either partner is likely to find uncomfortable.

Kilcher (1991) further contributed to our understanding of what happens during an induction year. Her insights complement those of Odell. In her review of literature on mentoring, Kilcher identified four increasingly complex stages which pairs of teachers in induction programs appear to go through: orientation, initiation, consolidation, and collegial collaboration. This kind of staged development is commonly associated with the change process, whether it concerns individuals adopting new models (Hall and Loucks, 1987) or teachers experiencing different stages in their careers (Katz, 1977). One implication for induction-year planners is to be sensitive to the stages both beginning teachers and mentors normally experience, and attempt to match the activities to the partners' increasing confidence and skills.

Armed with this sort of information and the confidence of several years' experience, the Steering Committee has begun to incorporate information about the changing needs and stages of induction into the initial mentor-training sessions. Mentors are encouraged to invite their partners into their classrooms to observe them teaching and subsequently, to observe and provide formative feedback to the beginning teachers about their teaching. While this has now become a clearer expectation for partners before the induction year ends, the decision whether and when to participate in these higher-risk activities must remain, ultimately, a shared decision by the partners.

Emerging Issues

One of the emerging issues in the BTIP has been the need to **address the unique needs of specialist and/or itinerant teachers** (often the two coincide) who participate in induction programs. Both beginning teachers and mentors indicated that when they did not share a common grade level and/or subject specialization, it placed an additional strain on their partnership. This situation is especially problematic when one or more of the partners is a specialist or itinerant teacher. Methods and Resource teachers, guidance counsellors, and specialist teachers in disciplines such as music, art, French Core, and physical education rarely have peers in the same building, if they are fortunate enough to teach in only one school. The possibilities for induction partnerships for some of these educators is further exacerbated when they teach in several schools.

The dilemma over matching mentors with beginning specialists centres on determining which of two key criteria for mentor selection should take priority. Is similarity of teaching assignment more important than accessibility and proximity? In New Brunswick, we initially did not differentiate specialists from regular classroom teachers. Lacking experience and guidance from the literature, we left the decision to the school principal and district coordinator. They tried a variety of configurations. The most common seems to have been to match mentors with

beginning specialists, primarily on a basis of accessibility. That meant a mentor was often a competent volunteer in the specialist's school of record (where they spent the most time), but not someone who had a similar teaching assignment. Responses from participants indicated that, despite good intentions, this arrangement often proved frustrating for both partners. Other arrangements in which specialists in separate schools were matched also proved unsatisfactory because it took an extraordinary effort for these individuals to make regular and meaningful contacts.

Several principals asked whether a different mentoring model might be more appropriate for itinerant specialists. I have not seen any literature on this subject, but it seems to me that some new configurations are worth exploring. In larger districts there might be a critical mass of specialists to justify holding periodic meetings or workshops which would bring both new and experienced specialists together. Rather than using a model which matches a specialist with a single mentor (who often has little in common) in a teacher's school of record, the "specialist mentor model" could arrange meetings of new and experienced specialists to share ideas, discuss teaching strategies, and form personal connections which might be maintained by telephone or email between meetings.

An ad hoc committee consisting of district coordinators from the Steering Committee met in March, 2000 to explore options for mentoring itinerant teachers and specialists. They suggested the following guidelines should shape adaptations for mentoring this unique group:

- The BTIP is a generic program that is not curriculum specific. Hence, there are many common concerns and strategies associated with teaching which can be adequately addressed by mentors, even if they do not have the same disciplinary background as their partners.

- It is most important that the mentor work in the school where the beginning teacher spends the most time.

- Mentors who do not share a specialty area with their beginning teacher might intentionally arrange half-day appointments with appropriate specialty teachers.

- It is essential to set up expectations that specialists will participate in visits and consultations.

Although it has taken several years to recognize that a single induction model cannot meet the needs of everyone, I find it encouraging that we have progressed to the point where some differentiated programming has begun. Another sign that induction programs are continuing to evolve has been the formation of an induction program for beginning administrators in two districts during the past year.

As we approach the period of peak retirement for both teachers and administrators in New Brunswick, I am thankful that our educational leaders had the foresight to identify the need for teacher induction in this province and the commitment to follow through on their vision.

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